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UNCLAS HARARE 001444

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION REITERATES TENTATIVE BOYCOTT OF  
ELECTIONS

1. (U) The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) announced August 25 that the party's National Executive had decided to suspend participation in elections. In a briefing to the diplomatic corps the same day, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai said the GOZ's proposed election reforms were not

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meaningful and that the following would be required for MDC to consider participating in elections: an end to political violence; repeal of repressive laws such as the Public Order and Security Act, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and the Broadcasting Act; an end to government interference with MDC's activities; and access to the media by the opposition. Tsvangirai added that the MDC applauded the SADC protocol on election standards agreed upon in Mauritius last week, but it was clear that the Government of Zimbabwe did not intend to adhere to those principles.

2. (U) Minister of Justice Patrick Chinamasa, quoted in the government-controlled Herald on August 26, said that MDC's decision was a move to avoid certain defeat in the March 2005 parliamentary elections. Chinamasa said he would present a draft election reform bill to the Cabinet next week.

3. (SBU) COMMENT: The MDC's position is not new but its vocal reiteration at this time probably reflects the party's belief that, in the wake of Mauritius, regional attention is at a high water mark. MDC is convinced that regional pressure is key to forcing the GOZ to implement the principles it agreed to at the SADC Summit. The practical effect of the MDC's decision is that it will not contest the upcoming by-election in Seke--which it would likely have lost in any event. Longer term, the party has yet to decide whether it will contest the parliamentary elections if the government fails to undertake real reform. The MDC would, of course, lose such an election, but many in the party believe that a boycott would play into ZANU-PF's hands and destroy the MDC. Still others argue for a boycott followed by a campaign of civil disobedience to pressure the government. For its part, the ZANU-PF leadership believes it is in the driver's seat and will win big either way--reflecting their calculation that most SADC members will accept cosmetic reforms and a crushing ZANU-PF victory. END COMMENT.  
Schultz